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**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-0913**

December 23, 2021

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ENVIRONMENT

The Honorable Rochelle Walensky, MD, MPH, Director  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
1600 Clifton Rd.  
Atlanta, GA 30333

Dear Director Walensky,

Thank you for your critical service to our nation during this pandemic. I write today regarding reporting from the *Tampa Bay Times* that the State of Florida has repeatedly refused to share data on the number of vaccinated individuals who have been infected by, hospitalized with, or died of COVID-19.<sup>1</sup> The article goes on to report that the CDC is deferring to the state's decision to withhold data. In light of the State of Florida's repeated failure to keep its citizens safe from the virus, I urge the CDC to release data on breakthrough cases in Florida as soon as possible.

You may be aware that on February 9, 2020, I wrote to your predecessor, urging transparency and information around COVID-19. In the letter, I highlighted that the Chinese government enabled early spread of the virus by keeping its people and the world in the dark. Now that we're facing an intense outbreak of the highly infectious omicron variant, time and information are of the essence. Our researchers, scientists, and policymakers at all levels should have a full understanding of what we know about the variant so far, as well as how it is impacting vaccinated and boosted Floridians. Additionally, accurate data on breakthrough cases will be essential for Floridians to assess their own personal risk and take actions to keep themselves and their loved ones safe.

The State of Florida claims that withholding this data is necessary to protect the personally identifiable health information of Floridians. Nonsense. I'm proud that our state has some of the strongest transparency and open government laws in the nation. In fact, Florida's public access laws clearly state that data can be made public "when necessary to public health."<sup>2</sup> If this isn't necessary to public health – especially in the face of an omicron-driven surge – then nothing is.

Sadly, lack of transparency, obfuscation, and elevating disinformation have been the hallmarks of the DeSantis Administration's response to this once-in-a-century crisis. As you know, Florida has refused to provide regular, useful data on COVID-19 infections, hospitalizations, deaths, and vaccination rates for months – even as the state once again became the global epicenter for infections and deaths. In August, Florida Representative Carlos Guillermo Smith filed a lawsuit

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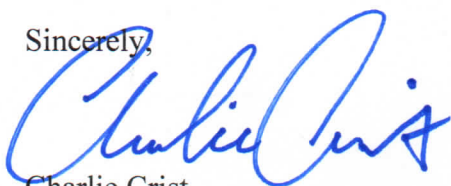
<sup>1</sup> Ian Hodgson. "Why won't Florida, CDC release state's breakthrough COVID data?" *Tampa Bay Times*. December 22, 2021. <https://www.tampabay.com/news/health/2021/12/22/why-wont-florida-cdc-release-states-breakthrough-covid-data/>.

<sup>2</sup> § 381.0031, Fla. Stat. (2021).

against the Florida Department of Health to get the data released.<sup>3</sup> The matter remains in court. Beyond just the data, Governor DeSantis has taken repeated actions to limit the ability of businessowners, schools, and local officials to take steps to curb the spread and keep our communities open and safe.

Deferring to an Administration that has consistently put politics over people throughout the pandemic is not in the best interest of public health. As we know, COVID-19 respects no borders – especially state borders within our country. A state that has repeatedly failed to protect its citizens from this virus should not get the final say on critical data. For the health and safety of all Floridians, I urge the CDC to release information on breakthrough cases in Florida as soon as possible so that we can best protect ourselves from an omicron-driven surge. Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

Sincerely,



Charlie Crist  
UNITED STATES CONGRESSMAN

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<sup>3</sup> Gray Roher. "Rep. Smith sues Florida health agency demanding daily COVID-19 numbers." *Orlando Sentinel*. August 31, 2021. <https://www.orlandosentinel.com/politics/os-ne-covid-lawsuit-carlos-guillermo-smith-20210831-fggjxyvutzbcxi5zmkyizpsgdm-story.html>